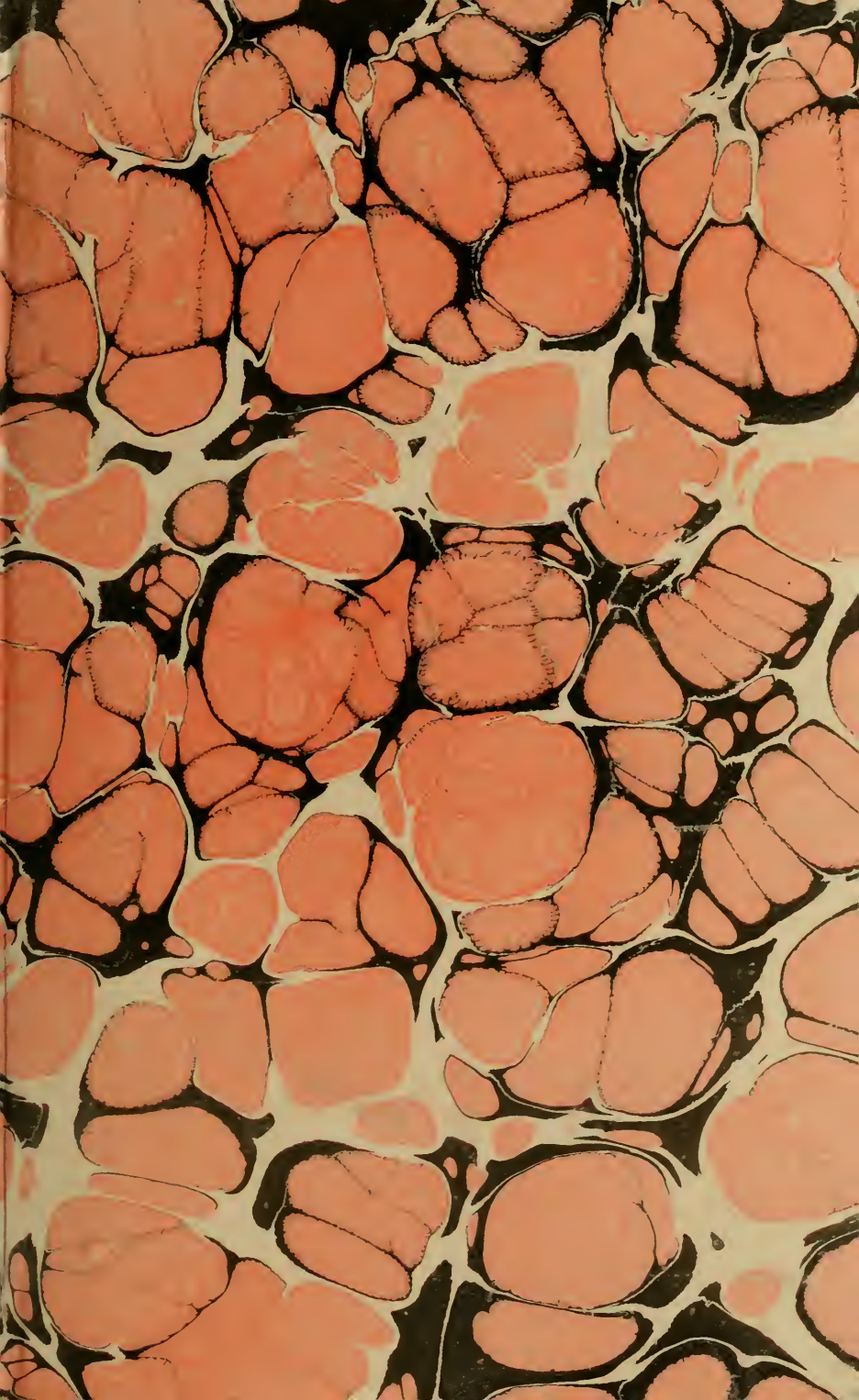




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1790

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

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CURSORY REFLECTIONS,

&c.

Mayence, November 30, 1789.

AT this distance from England, engaged in the bustle and gaieties of a court; in the very vortex of dissipation, and removed as I am from the source of authentic intelligence; I am but ill qualified to enter on the subject you have proposed, and less so perhaps to instruct you of what passes in the political world.—The vagrant life that I have led since we parted, has indeed furnished me with abundant matter for observation, and I have

not been an indifferent spectator of public events ; but it is impossible, amidst the scenes that distract me, to collect my ideas, nor have I sufficiently considered the present state of Europe, and the conduct of those who have governed it of late years, to give any thing more than cursory remarks upon either ; yet as far as my memory enables me to recollect facts, and my capacity to decide upon them, I will endeavour to render them as full and as satisfactory as possible, and at all events I hope to remove some errors which you appear to have too easily adopted, relative to the probable consequences of the recent revolution in France. I must however premise to you, (and I will demonstrate it by numberless examples that have happened in our time,) that there are few subjects on which we can reason with so little certainty as on political events, nor one perhaps in the extensive circle of human affairs, which contradicts more fully our daily experience, or that baffles more egregiously our most sanguine expectations. In almost all the transactions of common life, the judgment being directed by experience, is enabled to estimate

timate with tolerable accuracy the result of the measures it adopts; it is in fact it's principal, and, in many instances, it's only guide; mankind have scarce any other rule to go by, and if they found themselves deceived by it, or led into error, that spirit of enterprize so necessary to the perfection of the arts, and the discovery of science; in a word, the active powers of the mind would remain dormant, and the progress of knowledge be suspended. But this principle, which, with so few exceptions, conducts the merchant and mechanic to wealth and fame, is seldom of equal advantage to the politician, nor is it always honored with his attention: he is besides often compelled to calculate on a variety of contingencies, where presumption itself would tremble to confide; and he has frequently the mortification to find that measures the best concerted, and the most faithfully executed, with every probable assurance of the happiest issue, are productive of ends the very reverse to what he proposed.

Let it not however be imagined that all the miscarriages which attend public affairs, proceed from causes which cannot be foreseen,

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or, if foreseen, that cannot be prevented. Neither let it be supposed that the science of politics is so complicated as to be understood with difficulty, and that the interests of a nation depend on so many different combinations, that it falls to the lot of few men to have sufficient genius and industry to comprehend and discriminate them. The failure of public measures is less to be attributed to the incapacity of ministers, than to the passions of ambition and resentment, which are seldom susceptible of restraint in men invested with power and riches not their own, and where the degree of responsibility cannot possibly, by any human contrivance whatever, be rendered adequate to the confidence reposed. An individual who squanders his patrimony in thoughtless dissipation, feels the penalty of his extravagance in subsequent want and misery ;— he falls alone, perhaps, the solitary victim of his vices or his follies : but the man entrusted with the public welfare has nothing to apprehend from his blunders or indiscretion, and little from his malversations, unless indeed they

they are so flagrant and audacious as to challenge enquiry, and set popular clamor at defiance. He plays without the least risque to himself or his family with the lives and fortunes of millions, and tho' both are frequently sacrificed most profusely to his ambition or his ignorance, he is suffered to retire undisturbed from the trust he has abused without any diminution of the public esteem; the disasters of his administration are generously placed to the account of unavoidable misfortune, and his successor, confident of the same indulgence, pursues measures perhaps still more pernicious to the national honor and prosperity. It is to this impunity that we are chiefly indebted for most of the calamities brought upon us by improvident and corrupt ministers; nor is it possible, nor even equitable if it were possible, to render them accountable for every failure that may happen: for human affairs, notwithstanding the utmost efforts of human wisdom, will ever remain too much exposed to chance to be infallibly and invariably conducted to the ends we design them, and as it is difficult to mark the precise boundary

boundary between intentional neglect, and an error in judgment, it seems that our best, and indeed only security, must finally rest in the integrity of those, whose rank or talents recommend them to the splendid but painful pre-eminence of governing a kingdom. This is not meant to extenuate misconduct, or to palliate guilt, but to urge the necessity of a prudent choice of men to fill the first offices in the state, and this necessity will appear the more urgent, when it is recollected that men thus raised above their fellow citizens are exposed to the greatest temptations; that they become the butt at which Jealousy and Envy direct their most envenomed shafts; and that, assailed by flattery and falsehood on one side, and by malevolence and detraction on the other, it requires no uncommon share of address to resist the fatal effects of the one, and to preserve that happy equanimity of temper, which can alone defeat the more open, but not less dangerous intentions of the other. The superiority of a cool and determined mind has never been displayed with greater lustre, nor with happier effect, than in the instance
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of the present Minister : he entered into office in opposition to one of the most dangerous factions that have disturbed the internal quiet of the country since the Revolution : even the House of Commons, which at first supported him, withdrew its protection, and from motives which it is difficult to account for, and still more so to excuse, deprived the kingdom of it's government for the space of six weeks. The Minister, thus abandoned, was left to contend (as it was modestly asserted by his adversaries) against the collected wit and wisdom of the nation, (an implication by the bye that he was destitute of both,) and that his disgrace might be complete and inevitable, he had to contend against the force of numbers :—all circumstances considered, and especially the deplorable state of affairs at that lamentable period, no man but himself, perhaps, would have had the courage to resist this combined strength, and we know of no other in English history that ever defeated it. That triumph was reserved for Mr. Pitt ; but if his temper had not happily been proof against the illiberal and pointed sarcasms of

interested malevolence and disappointed ambition, if he had suffered himself to have been provoked by the indecent and multiplied attacks both in and out of Parliament, he must in the commencement have relinquished a situation which he fills with so much honor to himself and advantage to the public, and have left the country exposed to the depredations of penniless adventurers: nor have the injurious slanders of a later date, which accused him of the extravagant design of contending for dominion with the Prince, been able to divert him from his duty, or interrupt that steady serenity of disposition, which, no less than his great abilities, so admirably qualifies him for the important station he holds,

To the considerations above mentioned may be added others of no less weight, and especially that of being misled by false intelligence, ignorantly or designedly given, and which the incessant pressure of public business (which admits of no interruption) prevents being examined into at the moment.—This melancholy truth has been woefully demonstrated

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to us in the prosecution of the American war ; for with the strongest conviction of the inexpediency and injustice of the measure, with every disposition to condemn the violent and ill-digested counsels that plunged us into that ruinous contest, it would be unfair not to attribute the failure of the enterprize, if not the very enterprize itself, to the misinformation which the Minister received from men, who were either deceived themselves (which is scarce possible), or who intended to deceive him.—This reflection will naturally dispose us to be cautious in passing judgment on those who are entrusted with the administration of public affairs, but it should not amount to an act of grace for the facility with which they suffer themselves to be imposed upon.—It is not however from credulity or incapacity that we have to apprehend the most mischief, for men of that description are seldom suffered to continue long enough in power to commit any great or irreparable blunder ;—it is from the iniquitous misapplication and perversion of great talents that we have every thing to fear ;

those splendid abilities which are formed and intended by Providence to exalt national fame, and promote public happiness, operate in a contrary direction whenever they are abused : instead of procuring honor, wealth, and security to society, they involve it in disgrace ;— they spread ruin and desolation on the present, and entail misery and disorder on future generations : instead of conferring immortality (the highest reward that virtue can receive) on those who possess them ; instead of rendering them a public blessing, they render them a public curse. There are many who act as if the power of being mischievous, gave them also the right of being so, who regard their employment not as a trust delegated for the general good of society, but as the means of enriching themselves and their dependents, of gratifying their avarice, their ambition and their vanity. In the minds of such men, the public can have no place, and those who unhappily possess such sentiments, become confirmed in them from the impunity they enjoy, and the impossibility of inflicting (at least in
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this world) a punishment adequate to the calamities they occasion. Men high in office, with such dispositions, tho' with moderate talents, may commit a world of mischief, and such characters will ever abound (that is, men of little minds and corrupt hearts will always be preferred) in those countries, where the rights of the citizen are neither admitted nor respected (as on many parts of the Continent), and where the popular odium cannot reach or affect them:—being accountable only to the sovereign, (who acknowledges no rights but his *own*, and who considers every complaint against his administration as an attack on his authority,) they have nothing to apprehend from their vexations and oppressions, unless the people, roused by repeated insults to a sense of their wrongs, should appeal (as the Brabançons have done) to Heaven and the sword, and take ample tho' irregular vengeance on the Despot and his Instruments.

The truths here laid down must frequently have occurred to you : indeed no discovery of any thing new is pretended ; for what disco-

very can be expected in a tract which, wide and extensive as it is, has been traversed and explored in all ages, and by men of all capacities? But tho' no novelty is pretended, it is hoped that these truths may revive the spirit of patriotism where it is dormant, and animate those who already feel it's virtuous and enthusiastic glow, to a faithful discharge of the duty they owe to God, their country, and posterity.—These truths, I own, cannot throw any new lights on so beaten a subject, but they may engage us to look at home, and contemplate with equal pride and gratitude the happy constitution of our own Government; that benign and liberal system; the perfection of human wisdom, which seems no less calculated to secure the inestimable blessings of liberty, than to create and maintain in full vigor that dignity of sentiment, that energy of mind so necessary to it's preservation, and which, it may be asserted without any vain and impertinent egotism, does not exist in any known region on the face of the globe, in that force, splendor, and extent, to what it does in the British empire.

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I shall now proceed to illustrate, by occurrences which have happened since the year 1765, the truth of what I advanced in the commencement of my letter, that it is impossible to reason with any precision *à priori*, on the events of political measures, which necessarily depending on remote and latent contingencies, and exposed to numberless accidents, are often productive of effects not only contrary to what were intended, but what never could be expected from any possible combination of circumstances whatever.

France, humiliated and impoverished by a war in which her marine was destroyed, and her commerce almost annihilated, beheld with malignant joy the foundation of future hostility between Great Britain and her colonies in the mode that was adopted to tax them, and anticipated the moment that was to revenge her for the losses and disgraces she had suffered from a victorious enemy. She was indeed disappointed at the time, by the repeal of the stamp act, but the declaratory law (that libel upon common sense) which accompanied that repeal, and destroyed the merit of the concession, assured

ured her that the vengeance she desired was only delayed for a short period, and the interval was carefully employed to encrease that distrust and jealousy, from which she promised herself much important benefit.

A distinction is to be made between that nation and it's government. The French are certainly a great and gallant people, worthy of our admiration, perhaps of our affection; but the Court of Versailles has ever delighted in dark and crooked politics, in which absurdity and infamy have contended for dominion: it has attempted to accomplish the most extravagant and iniquitous projects, by the most paltry means; and tho' at times it has appeared capable of conceiving vast designs, it has never in any one instance discovered any talent but that *esprit de tracasserie* which is the infallible mark and invariable pursuit of little minds—nor can it be matter of surprize, that a Court, in which the cabals of women (and women very often of the most profligate manners) are alone attended to, should descend
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to the meanness of low intrigue; for what inducement can men of talents and integrity have to come forward, when their continuance in office, their reputation, and even their lives, have depended upon the caprice and protection of an artful prostitute, who herself had no assurance of the favor that raised her into notice, and who had an interest in standing between her paramour and every man that was likely to convey wholesome, but offensive, truths to his deluded ear?—That the foreign transactions of a court so constituted should be regulated by the same principles and maxims by which it supports itself at home, is not surprising:—to sow dissensions in neighbouring states, and by that means hope to govern *without* as it governs *within*, will ever be the extent at once of its views and capacity; as a wanton expenditure of the public money will often be the summit of its ambition. It was those principles, principles that will ever produce public misery and disorder, and terminate in infamy, that stimulated the court of Versailles to profit by the blunders of the British minister, who, with the

declaratory act of Lord Rockingham in one hand, and a beggarly scheme of finance in the other, kindled the flames of civil discord between the two hemispheres. The battle of Lexington announced the dissolution of every political tie between Great Britain and her colonies, and France, concealing her designs with more than Punic treachery, dispatched with an indecent alacrity every wild and necessitous adventurer to the Western world, that was likely to serve her purpose : they were taught their lesson before they embarked ; they were to declaim against the British legislature, for exercising an authority unknown to it's constitution ; they were to exhort an oppressed people to dispute the power that would reduce them to unconditional submission ; and men, to whom the privilege of speech, and almost of thinking, was denied by the arbitrary maxims of their own government, became on a sudden possessed of both, and the champions of that liberty for others, which they had not the virtue to demand for themselves. In this manner the quarrel was artfully fomented, until the capture of general Burgoyne decided the

the court of Versailles to throw off the mask, and send a fleet and army to support the rebellion. No one at the time gave France any credit for her generosity, or attributed her interference to a love of freedom, or a sincere desire to see America emancipated from Great Britain; but as that emancipation was likely to diminish the only power capable of contending with her, it was resolved to accelerate it in violation of the treaty of peace; of the maxims of domestic policy; and even of all decency; for at the instant that these hostile preparations were making, and even after the count d'Estaing had failed, the most pacific intentions were avowed towards the British court.

The reasoning of the court of Versailles, as far as it related to the weakening of a formidable rival, was plausible. It was natural to suppose that the deprivation of thirteen flourishing colonies, and three millions of subjects, who came to the mother country for every article of luxury and convenience, would cripple her; that the most vigorous efforts

would be made to prevent so irreparable a loss to her commerce and dominion ; and that as every effort would add to the national debt, and encrease the public burthens, France would profit from the event, whatever issue the contest might ultimately have. I believe that most of us in England argued in the same manner, and dreaded an amputation that appeared so likely to reduce our consequence in the scale of nations. This apprehension was so great in the minds of those who had the conduct of affairs at that time in England, that they would readily have sacrificed every thing but their places, if by their meanness and submission they could have engaged the French to preserve only the appearance of neutrality — no exception would have been made to a *clandestine* supply of ammunition ; — the three fleurs de lys might have continued to mock the vigilance of our cruisers in the Delaware, the Chesapeak, and the whole range of sea coasts from Charles Town to Boston ; and the masters of French merchant ships (better instructed in the secrets of the British cabinet than the captains in our navy) might have
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passed unmolested under the pretence of going to, or coming from, the banks of Newfoundland, if an open rupture had been avoided. A spirited and circular declaration (to render it less pointed) should have been sent from London after the affair at Bunkers Hill, to all the courts of Europe, that every foreigner taken in arms in any of our colonies would be instantly hanged, and that all foreign vessels whatever, found within three leagues of the shore, would be sunk with their crews. Such a step, no less wise than vigorous, would have prevented the vast effusion of blood which our pusillanimous counsels occasioned: it would have awed France into silence and respect, and perhaps have saved America; for at that time, the French were neither prepared nor disposed to do more than connive and foment;—they would not have dared to declare openly in favor of revolt, as it was known for certain in Europe, that the affections of our transatlantic brethren were not then alienated beyond the possibility of recovery, and it would have been madness to have supported a people who were connected with us by every possible tie, and
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who from habit, from a similarity of manners, and even from motives of interest and convenience, might be supposed willing to listen to the first overtures of accommodation, and submit to the mild and equitable government which in a moment of anger they had renounced.—Bold and decisive measures are unknown to the court of Versailles; its talent is to circumvent, trifle, and deceive:—it seems to have adopted, and even to have improved upon the favorite maxim of Louis the XIth, “ *Qui ne sait dissimuler, ne sait regner* ;” and the scandalous timidity of the British ministry, it must be confessed, afforded ample room for the display of all those little tricks and little springs by which that court has been for ages kept in motion.—Whatever advantages France promised herself from the contest in the beginning, those advantages seemed infallibly secured to her after she had contrived to draw Spain and Holland into the dispute:—I believe it was the general opinion of all the world that we should be compelled to solicit peace on any terms the victors would condescend to dictate, and that we should be degraded

graded to hold the third rank among the states of Europe. That such an opinion was supported by every probability will hardly be disputed : we were assailed on all sides, and supported on none : we even seemed to have joined issue with our enemies, and to have fought against ourselves. Officers hostile to the minister, and who had an interest in his disgrace, were entrusted with the command of fleets and armies — neglect and misconduct marked their proceedings abroad—distractions prevailed at home—money was taken up on the public account with as little regard to future payment, and expended with as little regard to œconomy and necessity, as if it had been borrowed by a graceless spendthrift to answer the purpose of immediate dissipation. The depression of the public funds to near forty per cent. announced that the period of national bankruptcy was not far removed, and there were even men, who had so little regard to national honor, as to recommend the violation of the public faith as the sole means of extricating us out of our difficulties. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Fox let drop a similar idea
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while in office ; — foreigners, I know, suspect him capable of such a measure : — Sir John Dalrymple, whose industry, if it was illumined by genius, or directed by common sense, might be beneficial to society, is also of that opinion, and has, in a recent publication, advised France to make use of a sponge, forgetful perhaps that there is such a thing as *public* as well as *private* morality, and that a breach of trust in a nation, is as infamous, and infinitely more fatal, than it can possibly be in an individual : for the fraudulent failure of a scoundrel can affect only a few, while that of a state must involve millions in absolute distress and ruin.

Now, sir, let me recall your attention to the futility of all political reasoning, by asking you, if the pleasing visions with which the court of Versailles indulged itself have been realized in either of the two instances on which she formed the most extravagant hopes ? Is France more potent, or England less formidable, than they were at the epoch alluded to ? Has the event answered in any degree the expectations that were formed ? On the contrary,

trary, you see the dominion and happiness of your country established, beyond the example of any former period, on the firm basis of *peace* abroad and *union* at home; an extended commerce; and the strictest œconomy in all the public departments:---you have seen her rise, as it were, superior to her fate, under every pressure of misfortune and hostility; and that, abandoned by every power in Europe (by those even whom she had fed, raised, and protected), and left to contend against a league as formidable as that of Cambray, she was herself a *world in arms*, and triumphed over the combined efforts of foreign and domestic enemies. But her victory has been rendered still more complete by the distress and confusion of those who sought her ruin. Their expectations and their efforts have failed, and not only failed, but, by a combination of circumstances which could not be foreseen at the time, have recoiled on themselves. In other words, the court of Versailles has fallen a victim to its own duplicity, and feels at this moment those evils which it intended for others. Every cobbler can reason

à posteriori, and, when the mischief is done, point out the remedy by which it might have been avoided; but without affecting more wisdom or more penetration than other men, it was ever my opinion, that if France supported the Americans, she had less to fear in her colonies (notwithstanding their proximity to the Western continent) than in Europe; and this opinion arose from my local knowledge of her sugar islands, from an acquaintance with the temper and disposition of the natives, whose minds being debased by habitual oppression, and enervated by the climate, rendered them incapable of forming at that time, and still less of executing, any project in favor of liberty. A contrary idea, I know, prevailed in England, where it was generally supposed that the influence of example would only affect her distant possessions, and that as it was the interest of all nations that had colonies to discountenance revolt, it was never imagined that France, and much less that Spain who had so much at stake, would secretly connive, or openly abet a measure that might eventually shake their own government. This was
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the language of common sense; but those who reasoned in this manner were but ill informed of the motives that determined the French ministry to adopt a resolution so fatal and impolitic; a resolution which has accelerated with wonderful velocity a total dissolution of their government, and introduced an anarchy infinitely more terrible than the most confirmed despotism; for there are few instances in history of a revolution more sudden and more violent in it's immediate effects, than that by which the people of Paris in a few hours destroyed monarchy in France, the duration of which seemed no less assured to the sovereign by habit, prejudice, and affection, than by the imposing authority of a standing army.

Those who suppose that the court of Versailles had no other view in embarking in the late war, than to distress and cripple us, give it credit for more patriotism than it deserves. That such was it's language I own; I am even willing to admit that it would have afforded matter of triumph to the nation at large to have seen us humbled, but the court felt no

such impulse; its views were still more contracted, and proceeded merely from that narrow and mischievous propensity which it has ever had to meddle in the domestic disputes of other nations---to excite civil dissensions, and to inflame them when excited.—At the period to which I allude, it had another reason less justifiable, if possible, for precipitating hostilities between the two kingdoms, and this was the handling of the public money to a greater amount, and with less restraint, than in times of peace, when the expenditure being known almost to a farthing, it is at once difficult and hazardous to misapply or embezzle it. All obstacles to both were removed by the war, and those ministers, whose departments gave them the right of drawing upon the public treasury, did not scruple to devote the money destined to the public service, to the purpose of wanton and libidinous extravagance. The facility with which they complied with the rapacious and indecent applications that were perpetually made to them, is but poorly excused by their reluctance to offend the quarter from whence they came; and when we con-

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sider the splendor and magnificence with which some of the most indigent of them live at this instant in retirement or exile, it is fair to conclude that they were willing accomplices in the plunder of their country. Common fame boldly asserts, that millions of French livres have been transmitted from Versailles to Vienna; and vulgar credulity, which, you know, always delights in the marvellous and monstrous, believes the report to be founded in truth: I reject it as a calumny, not from an opinion of superlative integrity in the parties suspected to have *sent* and to have *received*, but from a persuasion that the dissipations of the one prevented the avarice of the other from being gratified; for that his mind is sordid enough to covet wealth on any conditions, and base enough to obtain it by any means, will not be disputed by those who are in the least conversant with his character; but tho' the *gentleman* had no scruples, and the *lady* as few, yet she had wants, and charity, you know, begins at home.

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I have merely mentioned this rumour, which every patriotic Frenchman affects to believe, that you may be convinced I do not hastily adopt for gospel all that is reported, and that I am very far from wishing to make the devil appear more dingy than he is. A residence for many years on the continent, and an intimacy with men of all ranks and descriptions, joined to a speculative and inquisitive turn of mind, have enabled me to judge with greater accuracy than those who have not had these advantages; and tho' I do not expect that you should implicitly confide in all I may communicate, I trust that your opinion of my candor and my known attachment to truth, will induce you to examine before you reject, and, in the latter case, to acquit me of a deliberate intention to mislead your judgment, or impose upon your understanding.

After what I have said relative to the motives of the French court for espousing the cause of America, and it's manner of acting after it had engaged in it, you will not be at a loss to account for the turn which their affairs have

have taken at home. Every circumstance proves, that the humiliating a powerful rival, which was the ostensible, and ought to have been the first motive to the war, became very soon a secondary consideration; for if France had been warm or sincere in the business, she would have employed means better adapted to the ends she proposed, and the money issued from the public coffers would have been faithfully applied to the purpose for which it had been demanded. The more generous, and certainly the more prudent part would have been, not to engage in the quarrel on any account; but, once engaged in it, the whole force and riches of the country should have been directed to that one object, in order that she might have come out of the dispute with a better grace than she went into it. In the war before the last, when she had full employment for all the troops she could collect, not only to defend her territories at home and abroad, but to support an army beyond the Rhine, she menaced us with an invasion, and actually prepared for a descent; but on this occasion, when she had no other enemy to combat, and was
better

better enabled to spare a force for such a purpose, her efforts were languid and feeble, compared to the magnitude of the enterprise and the advantages she possessed; and tho' it may be thought by many, that she performed wonders in the West Indies, I aver that it was impossible for her to have done less, without exposing herself to the laugh and ridicule of the whole world.

At the time that Ireland, under the pretext of defending itself, was permitted to arm, and the resolutions at Dungannon informed the British minister, that her object in arming was not so much to repel invasion, as to emancipate herself from the authority of the British parliament, whose right to legislate for her was denied in direct terms, and required to be relinquished, there was a necessitous adventurer at Versailles who pretended to prove his descent from the Plantagenets. This man was extravagant enough to make proposals, at which Don Quixote himself would have laughed; but as any tub will do for the whale, and this political knight-errant presented himself at the
instant

instant the French ministry were persuaded that a civil war in Ireland was inevitable, he was listened to with attention ; he was even assisted by them with money, and had a credit upon a commercial house in Amsterdam, through whom the whole business was negotiated.

The language of menace which the popular leaders in Ireland held at that time ; the passion for military associations, which they industriously encouraged throughout the kingdom, when they should have turned their thoughts to agriculture, and their rabble to the plough, if they sincerely wished to serve their country, promised all the Fayettes in France a most glorious harvest, and as it was expected that independence would be declared, many held themselves in readiness to embark on the first commotion. While those firebrands, actuated by ambition, by the hopes of plunder, or by hunger, amused themselves with Utopian schemes of wealth and fame, the court of Versailles premeditated no less an enterprise than the subversion of the British

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throne,

throne, by transporting this wretched phantom of royalty and an army into Ireland, where he was to have published a manifesto asserting his right by hereditary descent to the imperial diadem of Great Britain: a diversion was to have been made at the same time in England, and I have been assured that some of the most disaffected of the Roman catholics (without letting them farther into the secret) were founded as to the effect of a descent.

Here we see something like design; something like the grandeur and sublimity of politics; an idea worthy of Ancient Rome when it resolved upon the destruction of Carthage: but examine the means, I beseech you, by which this great event was to be accomplished, and you will recollect what I asserted in a former part of this letter, that tho' the Court of Versailles seemed sometimes capable of forming vast projects, it's talent for executing them failed; and if they were attempted, it was in a manner so paltry, and so ill proportioned in every respect to the end, that it was impossible they could ever succeed.

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This embryo scheme of invasion fell to the ground almost as soon as it was conceived, and the impostor, this miserable vagabond, the *ally* of France, abandoned to his fate, sunk into the obscurity from whence the little views of little men would for the moment have raised him.

That an attempt so wild and absurd in itself, so difficult to execute, and so impossible to succeed, could have been conceived by any rational being, must be matter of surprize to men of the meanest capacity and of the greatest credulity, for they are generally united ;—nor can we account for it upon any other principle, than that *esprit de tracasserie* which I have already mentioned to be the great object of all French ministers (the virtuous Sully excepted), and the distinguishing feature in all French politics, as every nation in Europe can testify.

This intrigue is not generally known in England. The ministry at that time had no idea of it ; indeed, to do them justice, they

were as little instructed in political measures out of their own country, as if they had nothing to do with public affairs. The departure of D'Estaing was not only a secret to them, but disbelieved, till the frigate that accompanied him out of the Straits, and saw him shape his course for America, arrived with the intelligence. De Grasse had reached Martinique before they knew he had left Brest; and Viscount Stormont, who pretends to be the best informed man of the age, not only in *Greek and Latin*, but in politics and commerce, and who now takes the lead in every parliamentary debate, positively asserted in the House of Lords, that we had nothing to fear from Spain, the very day before Count D'Almodovar left his rescript.

I recall these circumstances to your mind *en passant*, merely to convince you how very improper such people are to manage the interests of a great nation at any time, but especially in a crisis like that, full of danger and difficulty, and in which we must have been infallibly

bly crushed, if our enemies had acted in concert, and with a vigor proportioned to their strength and resources.

It appears to me to be the policy of France to consider her *present* friends as *future* foes ; at least I have observed that she has ever thrown the burthen of the wars in which she has been engaged, as much as possible, on her allies, and that she has never hesitated to leave them in the lurch, whenever a favorable opportunity offered to sacrifice them. This conduct (which is meant, no doubt, to render them incapable of mischief, whenever interest or convenience should decide them to take part against her) was rigidly adhered to throughout the whole of the late war. The Americans were amused with splendid promises (which it would have cost nothing to retract or deny) until the possibility of reconciliation with England was totally destroyed : nor were they realized at any subsequent period to their full extent ; so far from it, that her admiral Monsieur de Ternay (who is supposed by many to have died of chagrin at Rhode Island) was at one time destitute
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of provisions, and without money or credit to purchase them, and it is known that his fleet was saved by the exertions of the French consul at Boston, who, having married the niece of Mr. Hancock, had created an interest in the country which enabled him to serve his employers. I speak from facts; for I have seen the correspondence that passed between the parties on that occasion, and the grateful acknowledgments of the former to the latter for his patriotism, zeal, and humanity.

The Spaniards, whose rooted antipathy to the French nation would secure them from being the dupes of French politics, if their inclinations or interests had been consulted at Madrid, were also invited to a share of the disgrace and expences of a disastrous and dishonorable war. Their late king, whose poverty of intellects rendered him an easy victim to the artifices of the French court, fancied himself at the head of the house of Bourbon, as *l'ainé de la famille*, and under that idea he thought that he governed both kingdoms, when in fact he was the *tool* of one, and the *derision* of the other.

other. Whoever flattered this particular weakness, this extravagant vanity in the old man, was sure to carry their point, and, on reminding him of the intrepid language of a British officer at Naples in the year 1744, when he gave him an hour to decide the fate of that superb city, it was easy to engage him in a war with England.

The prince of Orange, who to a better understanding (for he could not have a worse) added the advantage of better counsels, saw through the designs of the Gallic ministry, and very prudently evaded leaving his own coast defenceless, to swell the triumph of the Brest squadron. Hence all the clamor, all the little manœuvres that were openly and secretly set in motion, not only to bring his government into contempt, but his family to ruin. Hence all the basseſſe, fawning, servility, and cringing of the French minister at the Hague, to the meanest shopkeeper in Amsterdam. Hence all the atrocious calumnies that were invented for the iniquitous purpose of creating jealousies in the minds, and alienating the affections of the people of Holland, in the criminal

minal hope that the defection of the most opulent and most populous province would be followed by that of the others. Hence the cabals and conspiracies against the late duke of Brunſwick, even after he had been driven into exile. In a word, from this prudent and patriotic attention to home defence, aroſe all thoſe diſorders and miſchiefs that had nearly annihilated the republic, and which terminated in thoſe ſcenes of deſolation, robbery, and bloodſhed, of which you were accidentally a ſpectator.

Now, ſir, examine the conduct of the court of Verſailles throughout the whole of theſe nefarious proceedings: recollect the aſſiduities of their miniſter to acquire the confidence of thoſe whom he was afterwards to play off, and to move at his pleaſure, or rather at the pleaſure of thoſe who employed him, for he was but the inſtrument: recollect the falſhoods that were invented and induſtriouſly circulated to prove that the intereſts of the Seven Provinces had been betrayed, and finally the aſſurances that were ſo confidently, nay impudently given, of full and ample ſupport in caſe
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of danger, when it was suggested by the most wary of the factious party, that Prussia and England would never remain indifferent to the violence and injustice with which it was proposed to treat the Stadtholder: recollect that it was upon the faith of these assurances, so repeatedly given, that they began to strip him (russian like), and leave him nothing but his innocence, and the glory of being descended from those who had rescued the country from the tyranny of Philip the II^d. Let me also recall to your mind the profound dissimulation with which these offers of friendship and protection were continued, until impudence itself would have blushed to dissemble. I aver it to be a fact, (for I was in the neighbourhood at the time,) that, at the instant the Prussians were at the gates of Amsterdam, the patriots (as they called themselves) firmly believed that a French army had reached Bois le Duc on it's way to their relief. Nor was the farce ill managed that lulled them into this ruinous confidence. The French affected to prepare for war: they pretended to enter into a contract for shipping with a merchant at Ostend, for

the transport of troops from Dunkirk—to form magazines at Givet, from whence an army was to descend the Meuse. Some boats were even purchased. A contractor for forage was appointed at Liege, and vast numbers of artillery men, and other military adventurers, gentlemen with ruffles without shirts, traversed that principality on foot, and in single files, disguised like peasants. All these feints, you will acknowledge, were well calculated to impose upon the credulous simplicity of those whom they were meant to mislead, and who, even at the moment that they were abandoned and betrayed, looked up to Lewis the XVIth (God help him!) as the Messiah who was to work their political salvation.

That the cool and firm conduct of the British ministry intimidated the common enemy of Europe, cannot admit of a doubt. They blustered indeed at first, and talked big, and would perhaps have sent sufficient troops into Holland to plunge the faction into civil war, but not to bring them out of it, for that would not have answered their purpose. They
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were persuaded that Prussia would not act without the concurrence of England ; and that England would not dare to plunge herself so soon into fresh difficulties : but the laconic and expressive answer of Mr. Grenville to all their questions and tergiversations, “ *Que le roi s'arme,*” effectually silenced their impertinence and frustrated their designs.

At the time that this negotiation was conducted with so much spirit, ability, and success by that young and intelligent statesman, whose talents and integrity promise so much benefit to his country ; measures were taken, unknown to government, by our eccentric friend, to have the citadel of Liege put into the hands of the Dutch, the very instant the French attempted to move at Givet, by which means the navigation of the Meuse would have been interrupted, and the descent of an army, of ammunition, and of forage by water, rendered impracticable, until that fortress was reduced, which could not, on account of its natural strength, have been done without a regular siege. The importance of this post in such a moment, will strike

every man who has a knowledge of that country, and it's acquisition was certain, not only from the attachment of some particular people to the courts of Berlin and of London, but from the general hatred and detestation in which the Bishop was held, who, under the masque of the most sincere and unaffected piety, conceals a mind capable of conceiving, and an heart capable of executing, every crime under Heaven, that does not require courage to ensure it success. The patriotic zeal, however, of our countryman was rendered useless by the event. The French submitted to the meanness of abandoning their party, and government derived a triumph more certain and complete, perhaps, than it would have obtained by plunging the country into a war.

Let me now remind you of another instance of the perfidy and duplicity of the French cabinet, which, tho' not in the exact order of time, will illustrate still farther those truths which I have endeavoured to establish; and convince you that there was a systematic plan adopted at Versailles, and pursued with inflexible but cautious malignity, to accomplish the
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total ruin of the United Provinces. I allude to the bravado (for what was it else) of emancipating the Scheld from the fetters which the Dutch, from necessity and common prudence, had imposed upon it's passive and degraded waters.

When the emperor, stimulated by avarice, and by that restless temper which denies repose to himself and to all that unhappily comes within it's vortex, projected demands which he knew would never be complied with, and employed menaces which he never meant to execute; it was evident that he built upon the inability of the Dutch to dispute his pretensions with the sword, and vainly imagined that the bare mention of the *ultima ratio regum* would on this occasion be conclusive. Under this persuasion he declared, "*that the first shot which they fired at the vessel he should send up the Scheld, should be considered as a declaration of war.*" Prince Kaunitz, more prudent and better informed than his master, assured him that the vessel would certainly be
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stopt, and that, notwithstanding the dissensions of the Dutch, they would unquestionably unite to repel so gross an infraction of subsisting treaties; but as the emperor, like Lewis the XIth, carries "*tout son conseil dans sa tête*," (and this is not the only parallel between them,) he replied "*that they would not dare to fire at the Imperial flag*." The event happened, however, as it had been predicted, and when the dispatch arrived at Vienna with the humiliating intelligence, it was forwarded to his majesty with this sarcastic indorsement, "*ils ont pourtant tiré*."

These antiquated claims, which, to the best of my memory, consisted of fifteen or seventeen articles, were neither more nor less than a pitiful expedient to add to the hoard of about twelve millions sterling, which had been industriously accumulated by hook or by crook, by lopping off pensions which the munificence, public gratitude, or piety of the late empress had bestowed upon helpless and deserving objects, and by other means to the full

as ungenerous and indirect. In short, my dear sir, the demand of territory and opening the Scheld was the language of our gentlemen on the road, "*your money or your life*;" for whenever the port of Antwerp is opened, Amsterdam, which contains the life-blood of the Seven Provinces, must lose considerably. It was, in fact, a threatening letter to the republic, and a fraud on the people of Brabant and Flanders: the one was to be plundered under the name of *indemnity*; the other, under that of a *subsidy*. A similar conduct in private life would expose the offending party to a prosecution on the statute against obtaining money under false pretences; but, unfortunately for the repose and interests of society, the morality of princes differs from that of individuals.

The Dutch, however, notwithstanding their quarrels amongst themselves, were not intimidated: they had not only the spirit to reject the extravagant demands that were made, but the good-humour to laugh at them; and if they had been left at liberty to manage their own affairs, I have no doubt but the celebrated
distich

distich that was written, I think, on Lewis the XIVth, or his great-grandson,

The king of France, with 40,000 men,

March'd up the hill, and so march'd down again,

would have been applied with greater justice to the enterprising Joseph; for the republic prepared for resistance, and would have left the issue of the dispute to the decision of the sword; but as this would have defeated the more refined politics of the French minister, the mediation of his court was immediately offered, and could not decently or safely be refused. He was aware, that a public enemy *without*, would put an end to domestic feuds *within*, and this was not his object: he was also sensible, that, if hostilities commenced, his court would be reduced to the alternative of supporting the Dutch, or discovering the insincerity of it's professions, and either would have proved fatal to the views it had formed. It was a dilemma which required some dexterity to avoid, and the conduct of Monsieur de Vergennes was at one time so ambiguous even at Versailles, that, on the queen's desiring him
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to recollect that the emperor was her brother, he coolly replied, “ *that he should never forget that the sister of the emperor was the queen of France.*”

Independent of this hint, it was necessary to preserve appearances with the court of Vienna; for tho’ it was known it did not expect that ALL it had asked would be *granted*, yet it was never imagined that ALL would be GIVEN UP, and that too with as little ceremony as it had been demanded. Besides, the *Imperial fiat* had pronounced the first shot on the part of Holland to be a declaration of war;—that shot was fired, and, as even the possibility of an amicable accommodation seemed excluded by this step, *comment eviter la guerre, sans que sa majesté Imperiale se donne un dementi?*—All this was embarrassing; for, though the catalogue of claims was susceptible of an arrangement, yet the *honor* of the emperor was at stake, and it was not easy to fall upon an expedient for saving it.

Such partly was the language which was held at the Hague, but at Vienna another jar-

gon was spoken: it was contended, that the faith of treaties was the basis of all concord and friendship between independent states, and that they ought to be inviolably observed—the injustice of such enormous demands was afterwards examined, and commented upon with decent energy—the impossibility of acceding to them was modestly advanced, and it was respectfully insinuated that the court of Versailles would be compelled to espouse the interests of the republic, if reasonable terms were refused.

These arguments had the desired effect, *et comme il ne coute rien à l'empereur de se reculer*, he condescended to reduce his pretensions to what *he* thought moderate, but which were peremptorily rejected by the Dutch. Another *ultimatum* was afterwards transmitted, which was also rejected. This was followed by *another*, which, though less insolent and extravagant than the former, met with the same fate. The emperor became outrageous; Vergennes was disconcerted by Batavian obstinacy, and had recourse to threats. The Prince de Ligne assured me, that he had received orders

ders to march the 15th of September, if these final terms (as they were called) were not acceded to ; and hostilities were thought inevitable by those who had not attended to the facility with which his Imperial majesty retracts and recedes, the instant he finds that men are not to be frightened by big words and menaces. You were astonished, I know, after all these immense preparations, and a resolution to begin the war by a day fixed for that purpose, that a farther respite was *graciously* allowed, until the return of a courier from Vienna (who by the bye never went); but how much more surprised were you, when *another* ultimatum, which had been kept in *petto*, (and which was as modest as an ultimatum can be,) was produced, and all the pompous and extravagant demands that had been made, almost entirely abandoned !

The French minister, apprehensive that all his labor would prove fruitless, and his views be defeated, had already begun to talk in high terms, and threatened to leave the States General to their fate, notwithstanding he had en-

couraged them to resist the Imperial demands, to augment their land forces, and had actually saddled a man on them, (whom he wished to get rid of,) to whom they gave a regiment that bore his name (the legion of Maillebois), and all the appointments with the rank and authority of commander in chief,

The whole conduct of Monsieur de Vergennes in the beginning announced an intention to support them, and he absolutely promised it, provided they would be patient, and act merely on the defensive, “ *d’avoir seulement un peu de menagement pour l’empereur*”—nay, he even carried the deception so far (the better to remove all doubts of his sincerity) as to order the troops on the frontiers of Brabant to hold themselves in readiness: artillery was also provided at Douay; and, at one time, the cavalry at Valenciennes were directed to be ready to march at an hour’s notice.

All this appeared so convincing, that suspicion itself would have been lulled into confidence. The shot that was fired, however, furnished

furnished him with an excuse to change his language: he pretended that they had gone *too far*; that the outrage they had committed had destroyed the pleasing prospect he had of settling their differences with the court of Vienna, and that he could not answer for the consequences of their imprudence and impatience. It was urged in vain that they had acted only on the defensive; that their frigate did no more than it's duty in defending a passage which had been shut by treaty, and which had been attempted to be forced; and that the *emperor*, not *they*, had fought the quarrel. The occasion was too favorable to his purpose to be relinquished, and evasions cost nothing. The shot they had fired was still the subject of complaint; and, finding themselves in danger of being deserted by their *friends*, they finally consented to cede, or rather to exchange a fort on the Scheld; to pay near a million sterling, by way of indemnification for the expences of marching the regiments of Wurmser and Bender into the Pays Bas; and (at which gravity itself will be provoked to laugh) it was agreed, "*pour sauver*
" l'hon-

“ *l'honneur de l'empereur,*” to send an embassy to Vienna to apologize for the insult pretended to have been offered to his flag.

Thus ended this famous negotiation, to the manifest prejudice of one party, and the infamy of the other: for, if the claims of the emperor were well founded, the terms on which they were compromised were disgraceful; if they were unjust, he was not less infamous, and the republic was plundered. There is no medium. The States General had been required to give up Mæstricht; a part of Outre Meuse; a marquisate or two; and, if I am not mistaken, some bailiwicks: an enormous sum of money, with interest, said to be owing, was also demanded; and the free navigation of the Scheld. There were some other articles which I do not remember; but compare the sum total *demanded*, with the sum total *paid*, and tell me if you think, that, if the former had been *equitable*, the latter would have been *accepted*? For the Dutch, after all their losses, are well able to pay twenty shillings in the pound; and I am sure, from the character
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of the man, that so paltry a consideration would never have been taken in *full* for so large a debt, if it had been just. But the fact is, the Dutch were *bullied* on one side, and *betrayed* on the other; for if Monsieur de Vergennes had not been resolved upon distressing them at all events, and on weakening them by every possible means he could devise, they would never have paid a stiver.—I should think it very extraordinary in a *friend*, that would advise me to compromise matters with an incendiary, who, without any right in law or equity, and presuming more on my *weakness* than on his own *prowess*, should think proper to demand half my fortune; and equally so, if it was expected of me to reward his impudence and dishonesty by a pecuniary present after he had relinquished his ill founded pretensions to my property.

Now, sir, let me entreat of you to examine all the facts that I have stated, as well as others that must occur to you, and to examine, with your usual penetration and precision, the whole conduct of the French cabinet of late years towards

towards the Seven Provinces. Remember, I beseech you, the artful manner in which it insinuated itself into favor, for the purpose of plunging them, contrary to their interest, into a war with an old and faithful ally—the foul and illiberal means it employed in the midst of that war, and after it's conclusion, to impeach the integrity of the Stadtholder, for the purpose of depriving him of all trust and confidence, and creating dissentions in the republic which threatened it's very existence: recall to your mind the duplicity of the pretended mediation of the court of Versailles with that of Vienna, which terminated in plundering the Dutch of almost a million sterling; and, finally, it's mean and dishonorable desertion of the party which it had seduced, and precipitated into acts of brutal and unpardonable violence, under the most solemn assurance of protection and support: combine and weigh all these circumstances together, and answer me candidly, if you do not perceive, throughout the whole of these multifarious and iniquitous transactions, one perfect design, a regular pre-concerted plan, artfully begun, and deliberately pur-

purſued to a certain point, that is, to the mean and ſcandalous deſertion of it's own ſyſtem and views in September, 1787, in which the principal object was not ſo much to detach the Dutch from the Britiſh intereſts, and unite them to thoſe of France, as to impoveriſh and enfeeble them; to diminifh their ſtrength, and reduce them, by inteſtine diſcord, to ſuch a ſtate of debility and inſignificance, as to render it a matter of no conſequence to what ſide they inclined in caſe of future hoſtility between the two kingdoms?

Nor were the dark and crooked views of the artful and deſigning miniſter who governed France at that time, confined entirely to the republic; he ſoared at higher game, and, in the extravagance of his malignant views, imagined he had laid the foundation of inevitable ruin to the manufactures and marine of England by the treaty of commerce.—I hear you exclaim that he is no more: I know it: but I reprobate the maxim of *de mortuis nil niſi bonum*; it was the artful invention of bad men, to ſcreen themſelves from poſthumous cenſure.

H

ſure.

sure. The virtuous man looks forward, and enjoys, even in this life, the respect that will be paid to his memory after death ; he feels it a stimulus to great and glorious actions ; and if we regard the meritorious with admiration and affection, if they live in our esteem after they are summoned to the peaceful mansions of eternal rest, to receive the recompense due to their virtuous career in this world, why should we refrain to stigmatize the profligate and wicked ? No, sir, let them dread the censure that will follow them to the grave ; let them know, that the infamy of their lives will survive their power of doing mischief, and that their names will descend to the latest posterity, marked with the execration of all mankind. I repeat it to you again, that the friendship of Monsieur de Vergennes was more fatal than his enmity ; that all his professions of amity were ultimately intended to answer some secret and sinister design ; and that when he embraced so ardently the proposal for a commercial treaty, he had no views of immediate advantage to France, but of future detriment to England ; and that, occupied with an idea
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so congenial with his feelings, and so adapted to his talents, he was insensible to the innumerable remonstrances and representations that flowed tumultuously from all the manufacturing towns throughout the kingdom, especially from Lyons, Rouen, Sedan, and Abbeville, in which the consequences of a treaty, so visibly beneficial to Great Britain and destructive to France, were stated with all the energy and eloquence that impending ruin could dictate.

An attempt was made, you know, to throw an odium on that measure in England, and the ministry were accused of having sacrificed the public interest to ideal advantages; but the clamor that prevailed on this side of the channel (for remember I am on the Continent) gave the lie direct to all the slanders of opposition on the other side, and justified a measure which the event has abundantly proved to have been founded in wisdom, and to have the extension of trade, and the general interests of the nation, for it's object.

The English ministry, actuated by a liberal and generous spirit of patriotism, sought to advance the prosperity of their own country, without doing an injury to their neighbours. The French minister was influenced by no such motive: he went, like a desperate gambler, upon chances: his intention was solely to destroy; and, contenting himself with sowing at random the envenomed seeds of distant mischief, as he thought, he left it to time and accident to bring them to maturity. When he was reproached by a person who lived in habits of intimacy with him, that he had done an irreparable injury to the trade and manufactures of his own country by that treaty, and asked how he could be so egregiously deceived in a matter so obvious to the meanest capacity, he replied, “ *Je sais bien que le traité n'est pas avantageux pour nous ; mais n'importe ; c'est un coup de canif à leur fameux acte de navigation, ce qui vaudra beaucoup par la suite.* ”

Such was the poor and despicable reason given by that sorry politician for having advised his sovereign to enter into that treaty.—

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I had it from the man to whom it was given, and you may rely on it's authenticity.—Such were the tricks and expedients so worthy of those who performed them, and so perfectly consistent with the uniform practice of the French cabinet, by which the maritime trade of Great Britain was to be eventually destroyed ; the Prince of Orange and his family disgraced and banished ; and the Seven Provinces reduced to that melancholy state of anarchy and public distress to which France is at this instant a wretched and deplorable victim.

And yet the plots and under-plots of this bankrupt court, had they been properly supported, were well calculated to bring them to an happy conclusion ; but they were negligently pursued, and, besides, the internal distress of the country operated in a contrary direction, and counteracted their efforts. The disorder which prevailed in their finances was not generally known ; it was known only to a few, and that few (afraid to make it public) looked no farther than to their own ease and
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emoluments during their precarious and transitory stay in office, and exulted in their dexterity and address, if they could conceal the canker that secretly devoured the vitals of their country. Even the most intelligent men in France never suspected the evil to be so alarming as it has turned out to have been, and not one of them supposed it was incurable but by an explosion which would involve in one complete and comprehensive ruin the nobility and clergy, and even the monarchy itself. A gaudy exterior, a kind of state varnish to cover political defects, was daily applied, and became so effectually the mode, that any man, however mean and obscure, who knew how to make use of this gloss, was almost certain of being called into confidence and favor.

Nor are you to suppose that the mischiefs which have fallen with such accumulated force on that kingdom are of recent growth: the foundation of them was laid by Lewis the XIVth, whose profusion, ostentation, and insatiate ambition, plunged his country into difficulties, from whence men of moderate ta-
lents

lents and good hearts might have extricated it, but which subsequent mismanagement and wanton prodigality continued to augment, until the farce of the Notables, or *Ruse contre Ruse*, was performed, and rendered it impossible to conceal the internal distress of the nation any longer from itself or the world.

You remember how completely Monsieur de Calonne was the dupe of his pretended friend the Marquis de la Fayette on that occasion ; what difficulty he had to prevail upon his royal master to admit him into that assembly ; and, finally, how he was betrayed by him. He might have exclaimed like Cæsar, and with a much better grace, on receiving that stab to his fame and fortune, *Et tu, Brute!* — Yet these acts of treachery and dissimulation will ever be practised, and even applauded if successful, under a government where men covet being great, and despise being good ; who thirst after power to gratify their resentments and provide for their dependents, or who seek only the means of enriching themselves or of supplying their extravagance ; to
whom

whom order and œconomy in private and public life are alike unknown, and with whom patriotism, public virtue, and reputation, are mere abstract ideas that express nothing solid or sensible.

The wounds given to the prosperity of France during the reign of the most pompous if not most dissolute of all it's princes, instead of being probed in order to be cured, were only skinned over; palliatives, not remedies, were administered, and the deluded patient, injured and insulted by a succession of empyrics equally ignorant and audacious, has been reduced to the most fatal extremity.

It is not necessary to travel far back in French history to discover the cause of all it's failures and misfortunes during the entire period of a century. The reign and minority of Lewis the XIVth are the epochs from whence both may be dated, at which time France might have acquired a government more consonant to the rights of the people, and of course more permanent, if the Cardinal de Retz

Retz had been an honest man ; for, as to his abilities, they were despicable, but his influence and popularity were great, and they might have been rendered useful to his fellow-citizens, if he had, during the public commotions in Paris, condescended to think of their interests as well as of his own ; but he looked no farther than to a red hat, and he was base enough, for such a bauble, to have set the world on fire, if he had possessed the means, and could have carried his point by it. The kingdom at that time was ripe for the blessings of freedom ; it only wanted a virtuous man to have ensured it, and if that vain and unprincipled ecclesiastic had been capable of extending his views beyond his own little interests, he might have emancipated his country from despotism, and have established liberty (the greatest gift on earth) from the Pyrenees almost to the Rhine. You are acquainted with his memoirs, and it would be impertinent to enter farther into his history ; but what I have said may tend to confirm you in the opinion you have so often asserted, “ *that a priest in politics is to the full as mis-*

“ *chievous an animal as a monkey in a china-shop;*” and I perfectly agree with you, altho’ you will find me hereafter a warm champion for them in the Low Countries, not because they want to govern, for I am certain they have no such wish, but because it has been basely attempted to tread them under foot, and oppression, *whoever* and *whatever* may be the object of it, should be resisted.--at least it shall have my opposition.—But more of this in it’s proper place. I trust I have said sufficient to convince you, that nothing great or generous with respect to foreign, or beneficial or consolatory with respect to domestic politics, was ever an object of consequence to the French cabinet, and that it’s principal study has been to outwit and circumvent each other in their own little pandemoniums at home, and that whenever they looked abroad, it was to involve their neighbours in difficulties and distress, and even on occasions when no possible good could result to themselves or their country from the success of their paltry intrigues.

What

What a different example does the conduct of Great Britain exhibit at this instant to the world ! If her principles had ever been influenced by a mean and vindictive spirit of revenge—if the generosity and magnanimity of British politics could descend to practise those arts by which France has so often attempted the destruction of our country ; what an opportunity does her present lamentable condition afford for severe and ample vengeance ?—But the justice that respects the distinction between the people and it's government, disdains the idea of inflicting on the former the punishment due only to the latter. Her ministers alone are culpable---the nation is innocent, and even entitled to our commiseration ; for the maxims of those who have had the management of it's affairs, were not less ruinous and hostile to the natives, than to those against whom an enmity was avowed. In short, the rights of the people were often invaded, and sometimes sacrificed ; for it is not less the characteristic of despotism to trample on life and property at home, than to desolate and destroy abroad. Prosperity and content

are the objects of it's perpetual hatred and pursuit, as if it's sole delight was to disturb the order of Infinite Wisdom. The revolution that has happened seems in some sort indeed to have revenged the injuries they have received; but tho' the authors of so much guilt and public calamity are dispersed like the Jews, and with as little chance as that vagabond crew of being again assembled, yet their exile and disgrace would be but a poor compensation for the mischiefs they have occasioned, if the event had not furnished the means of erecting civil liberty on the ruins of tyranny.

Here, sir, you perceive that our conjectures have been realized; for you agreed with me, some ten years since, that the court of Versailles, in supporting our colonies, would introduce a turn for politics incompatible with the maxims of it's government, and which would perhaps (even in our days) produce a revolution in the minds of men fatal to it's authority. Men, who had hitherto been restrained from delivering their opinions on a subject declared to be beyond their comprehension,

hension, and at all events beyond their sphere ; to whom pleasures and amusements were opened with an unbounded and pernicious liberality, in order to divert their attention from the more important contemplation of their own miseries, became, on a sudden, politicians, and, in investigating the rights of others, they acquired a knowledge of their own. At the instant the court of Versailles was facilitating the independence of America, it broke the chain by which it had held for ages twenty - four millions in bondage. — Thus far I think we are agreed, but not as to the consequences of the revolution ; for you are of opinion that we have every thing to fear, whenever France acquires a rational form of government established on the reciprocal obligations of allegiance and protection, and becomes sensible of her immense resources. This is precisely the very reason that I shall advance in support of a contrary opinion ; for the wisdom that points out that rational system of government which you seem to apprehend, will also point out the necessity of employing the great resources of that kingdom

dom to repair her ruined fortunes, and secure her from similar calamities in future. Men, who are capable of conferring such a blessing on their country, will be sensible of the danger and vanity of foreign conquests, and, confining themselves to the arts of peace, reject all those idle schemes of enterprise and ambition, which, tho' attended with the most brilliant success, are always more destructive than advantageous to those who embark in them.

But let me ask you what possible good the French can derive from a contest with us? Supposing their situation to be as flourishing as talents and integrity equal to those that govern us at this instant can render it, (and that is supposing a great deal,) yet that would be a sufficient reason for not exposing it to risk; for under the most provident administration they never can acquire such a superiority as to ensure them a certainty of success. The force of the two countries will at the best be upon a par, and to engage on any other terms in hostilities with a power so formidable, where "*much may*
"*be*

“ be lost, and nothing can be gained,” would be madness itself, and of which there is certainly less danger at this period than ever; for, in proportion as the minds of men in that extensive kingdom become enlightened, in proportion as they enter into the management of public affairs, and become conversant with public business, they will discover the relative interests of the two countries, and how much it will be for the advantage and convenience of both to enter into the firmest bonds of union: for, in my partition of the globe, there are but two nations on the earth, FRANCE and ENGLAND; and these will ever have it in their power, whenever they have the inclination, to preserve peace and tranquillity in this lower world.

You are shocked, perhaps, at my annihilating by a stroke of my pen all the other powers in Europe (for those out of it have so little to say on the grand theatre of politics, that they may be counted for nothing without any offence to their pride): but as you have travelled from Venice to Peterburgh; as you are well acquainted with the general character of
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the inhabitants ; with the resources, population, and force, of the principal nations on this continent, and the state of improvement to which they are respectively arrived ; I trust you will excuse a trifling hyperbole in favor of by far the most polished and most enlightened portion of the human race. A reference to the journal of your travels and observations may possibly induce you to think my exclusion less extravagant, and to agree with me, that the preservation of the French monarchy, and a sincere alliance with it, would not only tend to the mutual interests of the two kingdoms, but to the benefit of mankind, by securing to them the blessings of peace, and exciting them by their example to the cultivation of useful knowledge.

I know that a different idea is entertained by many of my countrymen, for whose judgment in other respects I have the highest veneration, but who on this occasion permit their prejudices to interrupt the free exercise of their understandings, and to draw them into errors, which, exclusive of their illiberality, argue a
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want of confidence in the strength and resources of the nation. They are persuaded that Great Britain would find her best security in the dismemberment of the French monarchy: they even expected (because they wished it perhaps) that Brittany and Normandy, being in possession of the finest harbors, and of the hardiest and most industrious class of men in the kingdom, would declare themselves independent, and become a republic. Some of the foreign prints even asserted that it had been offered to the British court to put Brest into our hands, and we know it was proposed to burn the shipping in it's port and arsenal. The contempt with which so diabolical a proposition was received and rejected, proves that our ministry observe the same maxims of integrity in public, which have invariably marked their conduct in private life; and that, feeling for a generous and gallant people, emerging as it were from slavery, they will not interrupt their progress to freedom, by fomenting their divisions, and exciting them to civil war. National honor is beyond all estimate; but even if this sentiment was ex-

ting in the breasts of the confidential servants of the crown, and they were disposed to avail themselves of what you seem to think a favourable moment, believe me, we could derive no benefit from the temporary disorders in France, that could compensate in any degree for the cowardice and infamy of retaliation.

I have been at the trouble to combat your arguments in favour of disunion, because that idea appeared susceptible of support, and my conviction of your patriotism led me to believe you were serious ; but I can scarce think you are in earnest when you express your apprehensions that the spirit of revolt may extend itself to England, where the principles of society are so generally understood, and where the people express themselves so perfectly satisfied with their sovereign, and his government, and have certainly no reasonable subject of complaint. I know that it has been asserted that the lower ranks of life are prone to revolt, and that this is the opinion of all the great and little despots on the continent, from Joseph the II^d down to the Bishop of Liege, the
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meanest and most despicable of the herd (for there are near three hundred of them in the Empire). I know that this opinion has been propagated with more than usual zeal and industry since the revolution in France ; for the instant the news arrived in Germany that the Bastille was taken by assault, they trembled for their authority, and many of them for their lives, and since the death of Foulon they sickened at the sight of a lantern. But surely, sir, the interested assertions of those *kinglings*, or rather of such THINGS, (for I can scarce call them men,) are not to weigh against facts. The patience with which the people have submitted to their vexations and injustice, is a full refutation of the ungrateful and malevolent slander, and should convince you that the violence which forces them out of the habits of obedience, must be great indeed. If you look into Robertson's History of Scotland, I think it is in the first volume, and between the 130th and 140th pages, (for I have no book with me,) you will find he is of the same opinion : he expressly says, that "*subjects seldom venture upon resistance, which is their last remedy,*

“ *but in cases of extreme necessity :*” and again, somewhere further on, he observes, that “ *the people, unless their jealousies be raised by repeated injuries, are always ready to view the actions of their sovereign with an indulgent eye.*” But if neither his authority nor mine have any weight with you, I refer you to the evidence of history ; and if you should still be sceptical, I appeal to your experience : let me call you to scenes that have passed within your own knowledge and observation, and where your intimacies and situation have procured you all the information necessary to direct your judgment.

You have of late years regularly frequented Aix la Chapelle and Spà, you have occasionally resided at Brussels, and you are sufficiently instructed in the laws and constitution of Brabant to know that they have been wantonly and impudently violated. Our antipathy to the drones of the Romish church, and our well-founded prejudices against a religion in which morals count for nothing, naturally dispose us to think favorably of the capacity and intentions

tions of the sovereign who renders either of these the objects of national reform ; and this may account and perhaps apologize for the hasty and extravagant ideas that were formed in England of the abilities of the emperor when he ascended the throne of his ancestors. The injustice of depriving a number of helpless old men and women of the comforts of a cloister, to which they had been accustomed from their earliest infancy (and use, you know, is second nature)---the cruelty of forcing them again into public life, from which they had lived so long secluded---and that cruelty still farther aggravated and augmented by the scanty pittance allotted for their support, and the indecent manner in which they were turned defenceless into society, “ *the world before them, and Providence their guide* ” ---were disregarded in the general aversion to monasteries, as if the unhappy wanderers had forfeited all claim to the rights of humanity on assuming the habits of their respective orders. The reforms pretended to be introduced in the convents were attributed to the laudable motive of promoting industry and population (the real riches of a country),

country), and enlightening the minds of the people, by abolishing, with parental affection, that ecclesiastical tyranny which had so long confined them in all the darkness of ignorance and superstition.

Such was the opinion which was entertained of the emperor in the commencement of his reign; and, if he had confined himself to the abolition of useless convents, and faithfully applied their rich foundations to the charitable purposes he pretended to destine them, little opposition would probably have been made to this exercise of his prerogative: but he went farther --- he was not content with waging relentless war against defenceless monks and capuchins, but he invaded the rights of the people, and attempted the entire subversion of the ancient form of government, which he had solemnly sworn to preserve inviolate, and to which he knew they were as warmly attached as to their religion.—Considering the wonderful influence of the clergy and monks on the minds of the laity, it was a strange blunder in him to neglect conciliating the esteem

teem and confidence of the latter while he *suppressed* and *oppressed* the others. By this extreme indiscretion he united the two classes the most capable to oppose his designs, and whom he should have kept separate by all possible means, agreeable to the maxim of *divide et impera* : but so far from doing this, he even attacked the nobles, and seemed to hold their union as cheap as he does his oaths and protestations—they made a common cause of it, and when he attempted to introduce captains of the circle with the same discretionary power which they possess in his hereditary dominions, the flame that he had been preparing by his wild and extravagant schemes of reformation, burst out with such fury, that his minister, Count Belgioso, whom you knew in London, was compelled to quit Brussels. The Archduchess also judged it prudent to retire, and on her arrival at Vienna was overwhelmed with reproaches for her precipitancy and *cowardice*, as *he* called it, in abandoning the government. He made no allowance for the fears incident to her sex, tho' the spirit that was roused might have made even *Cæsar* tremble ;

tremble; and every courier that arrived from the Pays Bas was sure to produce a lecture on timidity, which neither *she* nor her mild and inoffensive husband deserved, and which delicacy, and even humanity, at least in a brother, would have spared.

The result of that business was an entire renunciation on his part of all those offensive innovations, and a solemn promise to observe the conditions of the *joyeuse entrée*, the magna charta of the Low Countries, in all their extent. The public tranquillity was restored, and the warmest expressions of generous loyalty, inspired by confidence, and delivered in all the fulness of sincerity and affection, succeeded to the gloom and resentment which injustice and oppression had excited. In November, 1787, Count Trauttmansdorff, invested with extraordinary powers, arrived at Brussels to ratify these concessions. He was followed by an adventurer of the name of Dalton (for general Laspy, to whom this officer owes his rapid rise in the Imperial service, was then in high favor at Vienna). This gentleman,

who

who had the command of the troops given to him to recompense his barbarity in Wallachia, was also invested with extraordinary powers; and, that the sword and bayonet should not be interrupted in their sanguinary course, he was neither accountable to the minister nor to the Archduchess for his conduct. This, you will easily imagine, created a jealousy in the civil and military departments, and of course retarded the operations of government. Neither of them, however, I believe, were disposed to lenient measures; for neither of them have any idea of governing but by *force*: the one possesses all that pride and insolence which Voltaire so happily ridicules in his *Candide*; and the other, from a total want of education and the strong habits of a military life, knows no other maxim than obedience,

It was not likely, that a people, jealous of their liberties, and proud of their chartered rights, could be perfectly at their ease under men so little conversant with the principles of civil government, and especially as the latter of

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them declared he would hang every man who presumed to wear the volunteer uniform. This menace, impertinent and premature as it was, would have been attributed to the insolence of office, and despised, as the worthless reptile is from whence it came (for the people at that time had no idea of resuming a dress avowedly hostile to their sovereign); but it was the harbinger of almost immediate violence, and the wanton massacre of several citizens assembled from motives of curiosity on the Grande Place at Brussels, the 21st and 22d of January, 1788, announced too clearly the intention of the emperor to retract his promise, and especially as the subaltern who committed the carnage was instantly promoted. The letter of Count Trauttmansdorff of that date, in which he threatens the council of Brabant with the bayonet and cannon, will be registered in the annals of tyranny. I have unfortunately mislaid this curious specimen of Austrian legislation; but I have another, not less curious, from the same gentleman, of a prior date, addressed to the council of Brabant, which I subjoin for your information.

“ MES-

“ MESSIEURS,

“ Nous n'avons pû voir qu' avec une surprise extrême, la copie qui circule imprimée, d'une lettre que les états de Brabant doivent vous avoir adressée le 3 de ce mois, au moment de la séparation de leur assemblée—“ *Pour vous*
 “ *remercier de la manière dont vous les avez*
 “ *aidés pour la conservation des loix fondamentales et des privilèges de Brabant, ainsi que de*
 “ *la facilité que par votre sagesse vous avez apporté à leur travail, au moyen des conférences*
 “ *qu'ils ont tenus avec des commissaires de votre*
 “ *compagnie; les états vous invitant au reste*
 “ *par cette lettre à demeurer à l'avenir avec*
 “ *eux, dans la même intelligence sur tout ce qui*
 “ *pourroit être relatif au bien public, et nommé-*
 “ *ment à la conservation des privilèges, et vous*
 “ *réquérant, dans la vue de rendre ce commun*
 “ *accord plus sûr, et plus profitable, de prendre*
 “ *la ferme résolution, que tous les édits et autres*
 “ *dispositions ayant aucunement trait à la joy-*
 “ *euse entrée, qui seront envoyées au conseil à la*
 “ *Chancellerie de Brabant, ne seront pas émanés*
 “ *ni exécutés sans préalable connoissance et avis*

“ des états ou de leurs députés, qui en délibère-
 “ ront chaque fois avec leurs collègues présens,
 “ vous réquérant finalement pour remplir à cet
 “ egard leur desir de prendre, et de leur faire
 “ connoître les mesures ultérieures qui pourroient
 “ être mises en œuvre selon vôtre sagacité ordi-
 “ naire.”

“ Sans nous arrêter à l'indécence avec la-
 quelle les états affichent par cette pièce *le peu*
de confiance qu' ils ont dans la promesse solem-
 nelle que sa majesté leur a faite, et réitérée sur
 le maintien de la constitution, qu' elle est très
 fermement décidée à conserver dans tous ses
 points, nous vous déclarons, que sa majesté ne
 souffrira jamais que sous le prétexte abusif, de
privilége, l'on empiete en quoi que ce puisse
 être, sur le droit de sa souveraineté, et d'après
 cela nous ne pouvons nous empêcher de vous
 rappeler très sérieusement, que quoique vous
 ayez prêté serment entre les mains des états
 sur la joyeuse entrée, vous n'êtes cependant en
 aucune manière leurs officiers, ni autorisés à
 avoir avec eux la moindre relation, sans la con-
 noissance et l'aveu de l'empereur VÔTRE
 UNIQUE MAITRE, duquel SEUL vous êtes
 officiers

officiers par vôtre état, et par vôtre serment; en conséquence de quoi nous vous *interdisons* très expressément par la présente, d'avoir encore sur les affaires publiques, aucune espèce de *relation, liaison, correspondance, ou intelligence* quelconque, soit en corps, soit par commissaires, avec les états ou leur députés, sans préalable aveu ou ordre exprès de sa majesté ou de son représentant—Nôtre intention étant, que si dans quelque édit, ordonnance, ou autre disposition que le gouvernement pourra vous envoyer, vous trouverez quelque chose qui vous paroitroit incompatible avec la joyeuse entrée, vous vous bornerez à en faire la représentation au gouvernement, qui jugera pour lors si c'est le cas ou non d'entendre les états sur la matière.—Nous vous *defendons* au reste de faire aucune réponse aux états sur la lettre en question, et vous ordonnons, au cas que vous eussiez déjà fait une, ou que vous eussiez déjà pris quelques résolutions sur l'objet de la dite lettre, de nous en remettre sur le champ une copie.—A tant, messieurs, Dieu vous ait en sa sainte garde.—De Bruxelles, le 13 Decembre, 1787.

(Signé) TRAUTTMANSDORFF."

From this period, new scenes of vexations ensued. The inhabitants were exposed to all the insolence of military despotism ; the soldiery, let loose from the wholesome discipline observed by that good old man general Murray, (whose prudence and clemency had already prevented a civil war,) insulted the citizens with impunity, and every complaint against their licence and irregularity was treated with mockery and contempt. Their patience and loyalty, however, kept pace with oppression ; and tho' every indignity was offered to provoke them into intemperance, they were resolved to give Mr. Dalton no reasonable pretext for realizing his threats. The bravadoes of this modern Alba were rendered futile by the firmness and coolness of Mr. Vandernoot the lawyer, who publicly admonished the members of the states to fortitude, as they ascended the steps of the town-house on the day of the massacre, when artillery with lighted matches were levelled against that building, to force them into submission or despair, and he declared in the presence of thousands, *qu'il briserait tous les canons de l'empereur avec sa plume,—*

plume.—The event, you see, has verified the menace.

After this, the tiers état resented the conduct of government by refusing to grant the subsidy. Threats were employed to *intimidate*, and promises to *seduce* them into compliance, but to no effect : they were inflexible in the legal exercise of a right which could not be disputed ; for the right to *grant*, implies a right to *refuse*.

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I will not trouble you with a detail of all the little despicable means to which recourse was afterwards had to irritate them; neither will I remind you of the wanton massacre of men, women, and children, at Antwerp last August, nor the pitiful and unmanly insults offered to a venerable old man, the Archbishop of Mechlin : all these, tho' they produced no immediate acts of violence, prepared the minds of men for future resistance, should they be driven by injustice to extremities.

From all these proceedings, you will be led
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to suppose, that the emperor was resolved to carry his point, and that the spirit of resistance fell in proportion as the provocations encreased.—No such thing.—In the midst of all these military executions, the despot and his instruments trembled. An application was even made by some of them to be recommended to the English ministry: they declared that the government, weak and divided within itself, was incapable to protect it's friends; and that, having rendered themselves obnoxious to their fellow-citizens, they had no security from their resentment, but in voluntary exile, and that to the number of thirty were ready to embark, with the remains of their ruined fortunes, for Botany Bay, if they could obtain permission to settle there. You will smile at their choice, and, in some of your philosophical reveries, trace their preferring that spot, to that sympathy which inspires men of congenial dispositions with a desire of becoming intimately connected with each other, and especially when you are informed, that a Monsieur Jobert, the head of this party, was afterwards dispatched to London for the purpose of clandestinely

destinely bringing away Monsieur Vandernoot, or, if this was impracticable, *de s'en défaire*—in plain English, to assassinate him.

Brussels at this time became filled with spies, nor were the first circles exempt from them. All the means that treachery and cowardice could devise, were employed; and so little idea had the chiefs of the civil and military departments of that consistency and dignity which can alone render government respectable, and give force and authority to its measures, that both were sacrificed to their fears, and in proportion as the winter of 1788 advanced, every proceeding was marked by puerility or stampt with ridicule.—Will you believe that the whole garrison, cavalry and infantry, were under arms twelve hours, to seize an individual, who, as he always walked alone and unarmed, might have been taken at any hour of the day, without the least difficulty?—Can you suppose any thing more absurd than to have surrounded the house of Mr. Vandernoot, in the dead and calm of night, with a detachment of four hundred men, and break

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into it at the instant that they knew he had left the town, at least, six hours before they were sent, apprised of their intentions?—But what will you think of their ingenuity and capacity for public affairs, when you are told that it was never meant to seize him, but merely to frighten him out of the country, and to intimidate those who remained behind?—He had committed no offence against the laws, nor had any legal warrant at that time been issued for apprehending of him. That ceremony was subsequent to the *burglary* they committed.

Many similar manœuvres were played off with a degree of success proportioned to the wisdom of their contrivance, until the emperor himself resolved upon one *grand* and *final* effort to frighten all the Netherlands into immediate and implicit obedience. Preparatory, however, to this great and infallible stroke of Imperial sagacity, many significant shrugs, woeful countenances, and all the machinery of the passions, were employed, and vague reports circulated that coercive measures would be adopted—

adopted—that, as the subsidy was refused, it was *probable* the soldiery would be allowed free quarters on the citizens ;—and, the more effectually to encrease the general consternation, it was *insinuated*, not *expressed*, that something very terrible would happen, in order, no doubt, that every man might form, according to his fancy, his idea of this very *terrible* thing, and become intimidated by his own conjectures. At last, the direful secret was revealed : the minister was to be recalled ; and Mr. Dalton, a man of obscure birth, was to supersede the Archduchess, and be entrusted with the entire management of affairs. Here was the denouement of this wonderful plot, and this was the conjurer, the cunning man, that was to lay the spirit of opposition, or rather the *fe, fa, fum*, that was to frighten men, women, and children, into submission.

To give an air of authenticity to these reports, preparations were made for the journey, which was delayed from time to time, in the hope that fear, that powerful auxiliary of ty-

rants ! would operate on the minds of the people, and induce them to prostrate their necks to the yoke. The information was received in sullen silence. The day of the departure was fixed—it produced no effect—it was postponed—these *ultimatums* were disregarded. The minister himself condescended to deplore the consequences of this fatal and inconceivable obstinacy, and seriously admonished them to render his departure unnecessary by a prompt compliance with the emperor's desire. The answer was laconic—" *they would abide by the laws.*" Monsieur Trauttmanndorff was disconcerted by their firmness, but he must set off to avoid being laughed at. The roads were bad, and, to add to his chagrin, there was an heavy fall of snow. The gentleman, however, departed, cold as it was; but a pretended express from Vienna happily overtook him at Mons, and brought him back to Brussels, on the very day that he left it : he even returned in good humor, promised to give balls, and endeavoured to *conciliate*, when he found he could not *intimidate*.

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These poor deceptions were too gross to escape observation—it proved the weakness of government—it proved more—it proved it's wickedness. You are no stranger to the scenes that ensued. The mask was soon after thrown off. The ancient government, which by the bye we are bound to support, was subverted; and the people had no remedy but in an appeal to Heaven and the sword. It is beneath the dignity of truth to descend to a refutation of the atrocious and unprovoked calumnies which the instruments of despotism have circulated by Imperial command against the peaceable, and hitherto loyal inhabitants of the Belgic provinces. The innumerable edicts with which they have been harrassed since the death of the late empress, contain the best answer that can be given to the various libels of a sanguinary and vindictive government; and if the provident industry of prince Kaunitz had not incessantly examined, and prudently destroyed almost as fast as his royal master writ, the press would have groaned under the pressure of his pen, and the country have been deluged with ordinances which

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common sense would blush to avow, and resignation herself have spurned at.

Had the emperor confined his rage for legislation to his hereditary dominions, where his obligations are rather implied than ascertained, and where no positive contract similar to that in the Low Countries appears to exist between the sovereign and subject, the execution of his mandates would not perhaps have been disputed, altho' all ranks of people complain of his despotism, and would chearfully shake off the yoke, if they happily possessed the means : but his situation in the Netherlands is different ; his power is circumscribed ; the limits of his authority are marked, and clearly defined, by legible and existing laws, which he has solemnly sworn to preserve inviolate, and which he cannot infringe without incurring the guilt of perjury, and forfeiting the allegiance of the people. The history of all nations proves that subjects are not easily provoked to revolt, and that their grievances must be enormous, whenever they appeal from the justice of the prince to the decision

cision of the sword. All Europe is informed of the illegal seizure of unoffending citizens, by the russian and merciless hand of power, at midnight, without any specific crime laid to their charge or form of process, and of their being clandestinely transported to Vienna, to perish in a dungeon, or on the banks of the Danube, while their magistrates have been ignominiously dragged to prison, for refusing to sanction illegality, or aid oppression. All Europe has beheld, with equal horror and indignation, the wanton massacres committed by the military at noon-day, for the diabolical purpose of exciting the people to revolt, that a pretext might be had for havock and devastation, and levying war against the defenceless natives. Yet these injuries, enormous as they are, and aggravated as they have been by the ferocious tyranny of a subaltern despot, whose brutality has been rewarded with the highest trust and confidence, could not have compelled them to deviate from that patient and exemplary submission which has ever distinguished them, and still less could they have forced them into a contest of danger and difficulty, the issue
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of which is uncertain, if their constitution, the last remaining security they possessed for their lives, liberties, and fortunes, had not been annihilated, and themselves reduced to a precarious dependence on the bounty of a man, whom kindness cannot win, nor gratitude bind. Under these circumstances, no alternative remains, but submission or resistance. They have adopted the latter, in preference to an abject and ignominious surrender of their dearest rights, and, in appealing to Heaven for the justice of their cause, they trust they will stand acquitted by God and the world, of the mischiefs that may ensue.

The wicked and cowardly expedient of consigning the towns and villages to the flames, and the still more horrid cruelty of exterminating men who contend only for their rights, may be terrible for the moment, and impose on weak and timid minds ; but the courage of a nation roused by repeated injuries and animated by despair, will rise superior to these last efforts of vindictive tyranny, and render them as impotent and abortive as they are atrocious

cious and unexampled. Far, however, from imitating a conduct so contrary to the received maxims of justice and humanity, they have generously spared the lives of their remorseless assassins, and, in declaring themselves released from the dominion of the house of Austria, they have only exercised those rights which they derive from nature, and which are implied or expressed under all forms of government whatever.

Now, sir, can you lay your hand upon your heart, and say, that this revolt is without provocation or excuse?—Have not their temperance and forbearance been exemplary? Have they in any one instance violated *their* obligations, or neglected, during a series of vexations for the last seven years, to bring their sovereign to a sense of his duty, and, which was likely to operate still more powerfully on *such* a mind, to a sense of his true interests, in soliciting by all mild and legal means a redress of their various and multiplied grievances? It is not to caprice or wantonness that the insurrection in the Low Countries is to be attributed,

buted, but to the imprudence, inconsistency, and violence of the emperor. *Omnis illa tempestas Cæsare impulsore excitata est.* To Cæsar, therefore, let the guilt, the odium, and misfortunes that have happened in the Belgic provinces, be attributed, and to Cæsar only. Believe me, I am as averse as you can possibly be, to that levelling disposition which would destroy all distinctions of rank. The unerring hand of nature has marked, in strong and indelible characters, such an inequality on the minds and capacities of men, and the very institution of civil societies is so clear and convincing a proof of the existence of this inequality, that it would be the height of absurdity to support a contrary opinion, or even to suppose that any commonwealth could exist in which the component parts were possessed of equal rank, fortune, and authority. Our reason also informs us, that mankind are directed by the general constitution of human nature to submit to government, and submission certainly implies a superior power somewhere. All that I contend for is, that this superior power, wherever it be lodged, whether it be

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confided in the hands of one man, or of five hundred, should be defined and ascertained, that we may know what we have to trust to—in other words, that we should be governed by fixt and positive laws, and that those laws should only know distinctions in *crimes*, not in *persons*. These are the principles upon which our government is established, and the only principles upon which a people can be secured from oppression, injustice, and insult.

If the blunders, inconsistency, and severities, which have terminated in a general and determined insurrection, astonish you, you will not be less so at the extraordinary means that have been taken to suppress it. They thought to extinguish one flame by another : that is, the glorious flame of liberty was to be extinguished by the conflagration of towns. Mr. Dalton, I am told, is a native of Ireland, and he borrowed that idea, perhaps, from his country. The other expedient of hanging was much better calculated to answer their purpose ; for if they could have contrived to put to death every man that was hostile to their

master, the rebellion of course would have ceased. In this they reasoned to the full as well as the man who declared he would get into a pint bottle, if it was *big* enough. When it was discovered that *hanging* and *burning* were not efficacious remedies against well-founded revolt, they *generously* offered a pardon; but a pardon implies guilt, and those to whom it was offered were innocent. This was another blunder, and, to render it still greater, the most meritorious (that is, the men who were the first to stand forth in defence of their country) were excepted. No notice being taken of this solitary instance of Imperial *clemency*, another pardon, as it was impudently called, was issued, without any exceptions: but this also was received with silent contempt; for what faith, what confidence, can the people have in a man who has violated his most solemn engagements, and who, even at the very moment that he offered a general amnesty, transmitted directions to the commander in chief to envelop the insurgents, and destroy every man of them.

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But do you imagine that these terms would have been offered, if they could have carried their sanguinary schemes into execution? No, believe me: a panic seized them; Foulon was before their eyes, and especially before those of Mr. Dalton---they trembled, and affected those virtues which neither of them possessed, *compassion* and *generosity*. Their language, which before was insolent, became humble; for what is more abject, mean, or despicable than a degraded tyrant! What excuse the minister and general can possibly offer to their master for permitting a force to assemble under their very nose, apprised, as they were, of the general disaffection that prevailed, and to permit that force to arm, to form, and to prepare for offensive operations, without making any effort to disperse them, until they were in a condition not only to dispute the ground with regular troops, but even to defeat them, I know not; but this I know, that, if his Imperial majesty does not conduct his iniquitous and unprovoked war against the Turks with better success than he has done his affairs in the Netherlands, the spread eagle will

will never fly triumphant on the battlements at Constantinople.

I should not have entered into all this detail, if it had not been necessary to remind you of the oppressions under which a patient, loyal, and industrious people have long labored; the mockery with which their complaints have been treated; and the duplicity of offering them a pardon at the moment their extermination was resolved upon; for the courier that brought this sanguinary mandate was intercepted by the patriots, and his dispatches were conveyed to their committee at Breda. This circumstance alone, were others wanting, would be sufficient to let you fully into the character of the man; but *I will not spread the compost on the weeds, to make them ranker* —— You are no stranger to the indignity and injustice with which the first nobility in Brabant have been treated, particularly the Duke D'Arenberg, to whose splendid hospitality all our countrymen who have visited Brussels have the greatest obligations, and for whose amiable and virtuous family every generous
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and grateful heart must feel the most anxious solicitude.

As to the part that Great Britain ought to take in this revolution, that is a matter beyond the capacity of a man so little informed as I am to decide upon : it involves in it such a variety of considerations, that the solitary argument in favor of the rights of humanity, may be lost in the multitude of political objections that may be urged against that country becoming independent; tho', for my part, I see no reason so strong *against* it's emancipation, as I do *for* it.

The politics of the emperor are so unintelligible, so fluctuating, and indecisive—his conduct from his first entrance into public life, (for his private life does not deserve mention,) has been so marked with a more than childish impatience and inconsistency, that all alliances with him must be insecure with respect to their duration, and dangerous with regard to their consequences ; and when it is considered that he has already attempted to get rid of
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the Low Countries by exchanging them with the elector of Bavaria, and that throwing such a fertile, and I may add luxuriant territory, abounding in wealthy and industrious citizens, into other hands, may eventually be attended with serious consequences to our political and commercial interests; it cannot be doubted but their independence is preferable to their falling under the dominion of any other power, and particularly under that of France.

By rendering the Austrian Netherlands independent, Prussia will acquire a barrier on the side of Cleves; and could the bishopric of Liege be separated from the Empire, as the inhabitants almost to a man have long wished, and incorporated with Brabant and Limbourg, whom it divides, the Dutch would not only be perfectly secured from danger on the side of France, but have their commerce encreased by the free navigation of the Meuse, whose descending waters are clogged with so many tolls and duties, that the transport by land carriage of even iron manufactures from Liege to Holland, has been
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found the cheaper mode.—To these advantages may be added another, which cannot fail of having it's proper weight with those to whom the public interest is confided; which is, that our security will always be comprehended in the security of our allies; for whatever preserves them from danger and mischief must also preserve us; for being embarked, as it were, in their fortunes, we must in some degree abide by their fate.

As to the probability of the courts of Berlin and the Hague forming other connections in violation of their engagements with the court of London, that is looking far forward, indeed, and farther than we ought to do; for, if this consideration, which marks a suspicious character, was to enter into political negotiations, no treaties of friendship or alliance would ever take place. It is always supposed, and I am sure it has always been meant by us, to adhere *bonâ fide* to the faith of all our treaties; and it is owing to this circumstance that foreigners entertain so exalted an idea of British integrity. I am ready to confess that the best

securities for the observance of treaties are, *interest* and *convenience*; and these are the two motives that will operate most powerfully both at Berlin and at the Hague in favor of an alliance, which assures peace and prosperity to the one, and protection to the other : and this being the fact, I believe there is no prospect of a change in the politics and sentiments which unite the three courts in the bonds of friendship.—But, as it is impossible to foresee what projects France may hereafter form, when order is restored, and she resumes that rank amongst the nations of the earth from which her distress seems to have suspended her for the moment; as it is not improbable but that the Belgic provinces may offer to incorporate themselves with that monarchy, and, by so doing, not only facilitate an entrance into Holland whenever she pleases, but put her in possession of the eastern extremity of the British channel, and of course the dominion of the narrow seas;—for with Brest at one end, and the Scheld at the other, she will be mistress of the whole;—and as such an event would threaten equal mischief to us and to the Dutch,

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the question is, whether an evil of such magnitude would not be effectually prevented by the creation of an independent state on the ruins of Austrian despotism.---This is merely a conjecture of my own, arising from my knowledge of that country, it's trade and manufactures, and it's strong propensity to unite itself to the French Government; an event which, I trust, will never happen, and which ought to be guarded against with the utmost vigilance; for I am no less an enemy to great and extensive kingdoms, than I am to large farms. The former are destructive to the peace and liberties of mankind, and the latter are ruinous to agriculture, industry, and population.

To these considerations in favor of a new republic, may be added others no less deserving the attention of a commercial nation, one of which is the facility it would give to our export trade into Germany, particularly to Francfort, which takes annually, in British manufactures, at it's spring and autumnal fairs, to the amount of from three hundred and fifty

thousand pounds to half a million sterling. This merchandize, instead of being forwarded by the shortest sea passage, and by the direct road, is shipped for Hamburgh, from whence it is conveyed one hundred and four leagues by land carriage to the banks of the Meise. The delay that this occasions, the losses it produces, and the increased expence of freight and insurance, may be considered as so many impediments to the sale of our manufactures, the demand for which, I am assured by several intelligent merchants on the continent, would be considerably augmented, if the charges and difficulties in transporting British goods were diminished. Several capital houses in Brabant and Flanders, concerned in the transit or commission business, have frequently represented to the government at Brussels the advantages that would arise to the Low Countries, by rendering them the entrepot of Germany ; but ignorance, or a cause less excusable, prevented their being attended to. Should the Netherlands become independent, the port of Ostend will be opened to us ; that is, the idle and ridiculous restraints imposed on the
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transit trade within these few years, will be removed, and commerce flow with it's wonted ardor: and, in addition to this, our shipping will be encreased, and our seamen multiplied, as British goods will be exported in British bottoms entirely; which I believe is not the case at present, as I cannot suppose that the Hamburgh vessels return in ballast to the Elbe.

As to the ill-humour with which his Imperial majesty may view the conversion of the Austrian Netherlands into a republic, I do not think it deserves a serious thought, and if it did, that it should be put in competition with the policy and equity of the measure. He has clearly forfeited all right to the sovereignty of the Belgic provinces, and, if they consult their own interests and safety, they will never permit him to exercise any act of authority whatever again.—But his exclusion is become necessary, not only to the security of the inhabitants, but for the peace of Europe. It is impossible to fathom or comprehend the wild and extravagant projects of a man whose head
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is crouded with undefined ideas of internal legislation and foreign conquest; who may properly be said to have an indigestion in his brain, “ *car ses combinaisons ne sont ni justes, ni exactes,*” as the late king of Prussia asserts in his memoirs, and who expects that a tree should bear fruit before it be planted. Such a man, indeed, can never hope to become *formidable* abroad, however TERRIBLE he may be at home; but he may, by his schemes of ambition and aggrandisement, involve his neighbours in disputes and difficulties, which it behoves them to prevent. The war with which he menaced Prussia, for the succession of Bavaria, in 1778, in violation of the rights of the empire, revealed in some degree his character to the world, and taught Europe what it had to expect from his *justice*, and what it had to fear from his *power*. An army was assembled for the purpose of supporting what he had surreptitiously obtained on the death of the late elector. His mother, alarmed for his safety, and anxious to preserve peace on almost any terms, sent Monsieur de Thugut privately to the king of Prussia with proposals of accommodation.

modation. The instant he heard of this secret negotiation, he became furious, and wrote to the empress, that “ *if she made peace, he would never return to Vienna, but fix himself at Aix la Chapelle.*” The Duke of Tuscany was instantly dispatched to inspire him with milder sentiments ; but the embassy terminated in a rupture between the brothers, and the emperor breathed nothing but war. You remember, however, that this *giant* at a distance dwindled into a *dwarf*, in proportion as the late Frederick approached him, and that fear had more influence over him, than equity or maternal kindness—he relinquished his pretensions, “ *sans que quatre cens mille braves gens se soient egorgés mutuellement, et cela pour quoi, et à quoi bon?*”—I quote his own words, which you will find to be exact, on turning to his letter, dated Littau, the 16th of April, 1778, to the king of Prussia. He was so enamoured, however, with Bavaria, and so desirous of securing himself a passage into Alsace, that the project of an exchange was again revived, and again abandoned in consequence of the Germanic league.—Finding his
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despotic views repulsed without, he directed them within, and trampled on the nobility in his hereditary dominions with a success that seduced him to try the same experiment in the Low Countries, where he met with resistance. ---His threats against the Dutch, you know, evaporated in air, as all his other menaces have done : his violence has lost him the rich and flourishing provinces in the Low Countries, notwithstanding the insolent bravadoes of Mr. Dalton, that he would keep them in subjection, or lose his head, *qui ne vaut pas grande chose*.— And as to the Turks, far from being discouraged by the losses they have sustained, they are determined to defend themselves with a fortitude and patience proportioned to the justice of their cause ; and if their prejudices, their religion, and form of government, were not totally incompatible with the manners, customs, and habits of Europe, they would probably have been amply revenged last year, by the defection of the Hungarians, who to a man are impatient of the Austrian yoke, and would have claimed the protection of the Ottoman empire, when the grand visir could have

have aided the revolt, if the insurmountable barrier which bigotry on both sides has erected between mahometanism and christianity, had not deterred them from the attempt.--- Nor has the emperor any security for the fidelity of the Austrians and Bohemians, but in a standing army, and who can answer for their patience under the injuries they endure?---In short, his subjects from Buda to Ostend have but one opinion of him, and that opinion is become general throughout Europe. ---Recollect, I beseech you, the principal events which I have slightly mentioned, with all the other circumstances attending his stormy and inglorious reign, and let me ask you what advantages---nay, let me proceed farther, and enquire what CREDIT we could possibly derive from an alliance with the court of Vienna? Even Mr. Wraxall would disdain the idea of a subsidiary treaty with his quondam and Imperial friend.

As to Russia, whom Sir John Dalrymple recommends ministry to court with the ardor and passion of a lover, her credit is so low,

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that bills upon that country pay a discount of almost thirty per cent. The clothiers at Aix la Chapelle, who furnish her with cloth, are compelled to leave their property dormant until they can call for their remittances ; and one house, to my knowledge, has at this moment near fourteen thousand pounds sterling lying useless at Petersburg. Her shipping in the merchant service amount to *thirty* sail. Her navy can only be formidable to the Turks, when the king of Sweden will permit it to leave the Baltic ; and as to her power, believe me, that a total revolution must happen in the minds of her wretched and degraded inhabitants, (for they have not yet obtained the rank of citizens,) before she can of herself become formidable to any of the states of Europe. Poland, you see, has already emancipated herself from the Russian yoke, and is rapidly acquiring that consistency, and consequently that force, which can alone secure her independence.

Now, sir, turn your eyes towards Great Britain, and behold her authority and influence
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augmented, and her domestic happiness and prosperity increased and secured beyond the example of former times—behold that harmony and unanimity prevail in her counsels which even the most sanguine never expected—behold your country raised to a situation that enables her to prescribe moderation and tranquillity to the other powers of Europe, and her public credit restored through the unremitting attention of men who have every claim to national confidence and gratitude, and who have not been less anxious to preserve inviolate the constitutional rights of their fellow-citizens at home than their honor and security abroad—compare this pre-eminence, and contrast these advantages with the present state of the continent; with its dissensions, tumults, and disorders, and you will perhaps say of England, in the sublime and figurative language of the poet, that she

“ Rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm. ”

Thus far I have hazarded my opinion on public affairs ; I say hazarded, because I feel conscious of being inadequate to the task you

have imposed upon me ; but negatives are my aversion, and I have a pleasure in obeying your commands. Tho' far from being an old man, I have labored many years in the political vineyard ; not to raise myself into wealth or notice, as many of our cotemporaries have done—for I do not covet popularity, and avarice, you know, is not among the number of my vices—but from an ardent, and, I trust, laudable ambition to be as useful as my humble rank in life, and still more humble talents will permit. A disposition rather active than enterprising, and a passionate love of letters, joined to that speculative and inquisitive turn of mind which I have already mentioned, have thrown me frequently in the way of seeing and of hearing much. With what success I have profited of the opportunities that have occurred of instructing myself or others, does not become me to decide : you are no stranger to my history, and when you compare my efforts and my fate, with those of others whose names it would appear invidious to mention, you will perhaps recollect with some tenderness of sentiment, the sincere and disinterested patriotism

triotism of your friend, whose first and warmest wish has ever been, that all mankind might be *free* and *happy*; and the second, that the liberties of his country may be IMMORTAL.

Adieu.

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